

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Plan Overview

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CHAPTER 1: TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction and Plan Overview	1-1
1.1	<i>Plan organization and overview</i>	1-1
1.1.1	Rangewide historical context	1-3
1.1.2	Cultural significance of the greater sage-grouse for the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of southern Idaho	1-5
1.1.3	Cultural significance of the greater sage-grouse to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	1-8
1.1.4	Idaho historical context	1-9
1.1.5	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2005 Finding	1-11
1.2	<i>Goals and purposes of Plan</i>	1-12
1.2.1	Goals	1-12
1.2.2	Purposes	1-13
1.3	<i>Conservation objectives</i>	1-13
1.3.1	Population objectives	1-14
1.3.2	Habitat objectives	1-14
1.4	<i>Development of the Idaho Plan and Local Working Group plans</i>	1-16
1.4.1	1997 Idaho Plan	1-17
1.4.2	Current and ongoing planning efforts	1-17
1.4.3	Relationship between Local Working Group plans and state Plan	1-19
1.4.4	Relationship to other planning efforts and regulations	1-21
1.4.5	Authorities and missions	1-22
1.5	<i>Guidance, tools and resources</i>	1-29
1.5.1	Summary of key activities	1-29
1.5.2	Local Working Group plan outline	1-33
1.5.3	Additional support and tools for Local Working Groups	1-36
1.6	<i>Implementation funding</i>	1-37
1.7	<i>Use of WAFWA guidelines in Plan</i>	1-37
1.8	<i>WAFWA Range-wide conservation strategy</i>	1-38

CHAPTER 1: FIGURES

Figure 1-1	Change in the population index for greater sage-grouse in Idaho, 1965-2003	1-11
Figure 1-2	Idaho Sage-grouse Planning Areas	1-18

CHAPTER 1: TABLES

Table 1-1	Status of LWGs and LWG Plans by SGPA	1-19
Table 1-2	Summary of primary agency offices in sage-grouse planning areas currently without existing local working groups	1-30

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1 Introduction and Plan Overview

1.1 Plan organization and overview

This Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) in Idaho (henceforth referred to as Plan) includes six chapters and ten related appendices. This Plan has been developed to speak to diverse audiences and to fulfill a range of purposes. To facilitate use by a variety of audiences, this Plan is being produced as both a print and electronic document. In the electronic version of this document the individual chapters are available for download as separate PDF files. The electronic version of this document also contains hyperlinks to additional reference sources and materials. This Plan is intended to be a “living document,” therefore, users may wish to check the associated web site at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/> periodically for any updates to the Plan.

In writing this Plan the authors used peer-reviewed documents reflecting the best available science wherever possible. However, in some cases non-peer reviewed documents were also referenced due to the limited availability of information for certain subjects.

Following is an overview of the Plan’s organization and content:

- **Chapter 1** provides an overview of the rangewide and statewide context within which this Plan was developed. The goals and purposes of the Plan are presented and the conservation objectives are identified. This chapter also includes a summary of the processes that led to the development of this Plan as well as the ongoing development of Local Working Group (LWG) plans. Most importantly, Chapter 1 identifies how this Plan is intended to be used by new and existing LWGs as well as in areas where no LWGs currently exist. Chapter 1 also speaks to the relationship between existing LWG plans and this Plan. Finally, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) sage-grouse habitat management guidelines, and their use in the context of this Plan are briefly discussed in Chapter 1.
- **Chapter 2** provides a summary discussion of sage-grouse and sagebrush ecology. A basic understanding of both sage-grouse and sagebrush ecology are important components of planning for, designing, and implementing effective sage-grouse

conservation plans and projects. Those who wish to access additional information about sage-grouse and/or sagebrush ecology are directed in this chapter to other valuable informational sources.

- **Chapter 3** presents an overview of the status (at the time this Plan was completed) of sage-grouse habitat and populations in Idaho. This information is presented in this chapter at the mid-scale, Sage-grouse Planning Area (SGPA) level. Information included in this chapter includes a summary of land ownership, SGPA maps, SGPA population data and trends, and fragmentation analysis.
- **Chapter 4** consists of descriptions of 19 threats to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat, and provides a toolbox of conservation measures to address each of those threats.
- **Chapter 5** includes a discussion of research, monitoring and evaluation needs and recommendations. This chapter includes recommendations and methodologies for sage-grouse population monitoring and for habitat evaluation and monitoring. An overview of needed research and monitoring activities is also included. A discussion of adaptive management concludes this chapter.
- **Chapter 6** outlines the current implementation schedule for this Plan, that summarizes certain important tasks and target completion dates.
- **Appendices** to the Plan include: a definition of terms used in the Plan, a summary of sage-grouse petitions submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (as of May, 2004), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 12-month Finding for three petitions to list the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, the WAFWA Guidelines for Managing Sage-grouse Populations and Their Habitat, a summary of the January 2005 Idaho Science Panel threat prioritization and discussion, key sage-grouse planning contacts for Idaho, Idaho sage-grouse project ranking criteria, a booklet containing monitoring protocol guidelines, lek monitoring forms, a county MOU template, and the completed LWG plans.

1.1.1 Rangewide historical context

The greater sage-grouse has historically been, and continues to be an important species across the western rangelands which it inhabits. Centuries before European settlement of western North America, this bird was of ceremonial and subsistence significance to native peoples in the region. Recent excavations at the Bonneville Estates Rockshelter in Nevada suggest that humans began hunting sage-grouse, and depositing sage-grouse bones inside the shelter between 12,500 to 13,000 years ago, based on radiocarbon dating (Hockett 2005; B. Hockett, archaeologist, BLM Elko District, NV, personal communication, 9/6/2005).

Little is known about the population status of sage-grouse during the 19th century, though journal entries of certain explorers and naturalists describe encounters with the species. On June 5, 1805 Lewis and Clark first encountered the sage-grouse, at that time unknown to science, near the confluence of the Missouri and Marias Rivers in what today is central Montana. Lewis wrote, *“I saw a flock of the mountain cock, or a large species of heath hen with a long pointed tail which the Indians informed us were common to the Rocky [sic] Mountains...”* (Moulton and Dunlay 1987). On March 2, 1806, at Fort Clatsop near the mouth of the Columbia River, Clark wrote, *“the Heath Cock or cock of the Plains is found in the Plains of Columbia and are in great abundance from the entrance [sic] of Lewis’s river [Snake] to the mountains which pass the Columbia between the Great falls and Rapids of that river”* (Moulton and Dunlay 1990).

In 1834, ornithologist John K. Townsend, encamped near the “Siskadee” or Green River in what is today, southwestern Wyoming wrote, *“...We have seen also another kind of game, a beautiful bird, the size of a half grown turkey, called the cock of the plains, (Tetrao urophasianus). We first met with this noble bird on the plains, about two days’ journey east of Green river, in flocks or packs, of fifteen or twenty, and so exceedingly tame as to allow an approach to within a few feet, running before our horses like domestic fowls, and not unfrequently hopping under their bellies...”* (Townsend, J. K. 1839). For a more detailed discussion of the historical distribution of sage-grouse, see Schroeder et al. (1999).

By 1930 most land with potential for agricultural development was homesteaded and in private ownership (Braun 1998). Much of this land was planted to crops though some areas could not support crop production, and reverted to pastures or rangeland (Braun 1998). Settlement also brought ranches, mines, energy development, reservoirs, roads, fences, towns, power lines and vegetation treatments (Braun 1998). Invasive annual plant species, introduced near the end of the 19th century, also proliferated (Connelly et al. 2004). In the late 1940s, mechanical and chemical

control of vegetation were initiated on western rangelands, peaking in the 1950s and 1960's (Miller and Eddleman 2001). By the early 1960s, the elimination or reduction of sagebrush to increase grass production on public and private rangelands was common practice, affecting several million acres (Call 1979). Public concern for wildlife increased greatly during the 1970s (Call 1979).

Eventually, habitat losses and conversions approached, and in cases exceeded 50% in some areas (Dobler 1994, Braun 1998, Knick 1999). Schroeder et al. (2004) suggest that the area of distribution of greater sage-grouse currently occupies approximately 56% of the pre-settlement (pre-1800) distribution of potential habitat. In general, habitat loss, deterioration and fragmentation, are considered to be primary factors contributing to historical declines in sage-grouse abundance across their range (Connelly and Braun 1997, Schroeder et al. 2004).

Estimates of sage-grouse abundance prior to the late 1950s were mostly anecdotal, due a lack of systematic surveys (Braun 1998). Sage-grouse populations in the 1960s and 1970s were two to three times higher than current populations (Connelly et al. 2004). Eleven of 13 states and Canadian provinces showed significant long-term declines in size of active leks (maximum count of males present per lek) between 1965 and 2003. Eight of ten states showed significant population declines during that same time frame, however, the annual rate of decline was much greater between 1965 and 1985 (-3.5%) than between 1986 and 2003 (-0.37%). Some believe sage-grouse declines coincided with the abandonment of broad-scale predator control efforts in the 1970s. During the post-1986 timeframe, however, sage-grouse populations overall stabilized, and in some instances increased. On-going concerns remain over impacts to sage-grouse habitat, West Nile Virus, and other factors (Connelly et al. 2004).

Between May 1999 and December 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) received eight petitions to list as endangered or threatened, various populations, purported subspecies, or species, of sage-grouse (Appendix B). In April 2004, USFWS determined that three of the petitions to list the greater sage-grouse as threatened provided substantial information that listing might be warranted, thus initiating a comprehensive range-wide status review. On January 7, 2005, a finding of *Not Warranted* was published in the *Federal Register*.

1.1.2 Cultural significance of the greater sage-grouse for the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of southern Idaho

1.1.2.1 Tribal off-reservation traditional and treaty-reserved rights concerning sage-grouse

The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation are protected by various treaties, Executive Orders, and laws in the matter of their interest in and reliance on the sage-grouse, among which are the following:

- Treaty With The Sho Sho Nee Nation Of Indians, 1855 (unratified)
- Treaty With The Eastern Shoshoni, 1863
- Treaty With The Shoshoni—Northwestern Bands, 1863
- Treaty With The Western Shoshoni, 1863
- Treaty With Mixed Bands Of Bannacks And Shoshonees, 1863 (unratified)
- Treaty With The Snake, 1865
- Treaty With The Eastern Band Shoshoni And Bannock, 1868
- Treaty With The Shoshones, Bannacks, And Sheepeaters, 1888 (unratified; see letter attached to treaty)
- Executive Order 12875, Enhancing the Intergovernmental Partnership
- Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites
- Executive Order 13084, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments
- National Historic Preservation Act
- National Environmental Policy Act
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act
- Archaeological Resources Protection Act
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- Department of Defense American Indian and Alaska Native Policy

The Shoshone-Paiute Tribes have never relinquished their land and continue to hold the aboriginal land title to much of their vast historical range, including lands throughout southern Idaho. Further, since November 15, 1985, it has been the announced, administrative policy of the Portland Area Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs that tribal off-reservation treaty-reserved rights are potentially exercisable on all federal lands within a tribe's ceded area, as well as on federal lands in other areas traditionally used for those activities, unless applicable treaties/executive orders state otherwise. This is to be interpreted as acknowledging the reserved rights of the Shoshone-Paiute to access their traditional subsistence resources on public lands that are a part of their traditional homeland. These rights include hunting, fishing, performance of ceremonies and gathering culturally-important resources such as sage-grouse.

1.1.2.2 Spiritual Practices Concerning Sage-grouse

When discussing sage-grouse, or any other cultural resource, Shoshone-Paiute tribal members invariably point out the interconnectedness of the total environment. These interconnections go well beyond biological interactions to include medicinal, ceremonial, and spiritual interactions. In fact, virtually all resource procurement by the Shoshone-Paiute involves both spiritual as well as practical aspects. Sage-grouse, like other fauna, are believed to have spirits. The Creator, who is responsible for all things, intended them to be used by the Shoshone-Paiute people for subsistence and spiritual purposes.

The Shoshone-Paiute learn in early childhood a set of basic principles of proper behavior for using environmental elements. When an element such as sage-grouse is needed by the people, a reciprocal action from the people is necessary in return. Reciprocal actions are usually prayers and/or offerings that serve to confirm the need to take and use sage-grouse, to ask permission of the Creator to use it, and to give thanks to the Creator and the sage-grouse's spirit for its availability as a blessing to the people. The Creator has shown the people how He wants resources to be used, so prayers and offerings are also a form of acknowledging that the sage-grouse is being treated according to His intentions.

Offerings are usually token gifts such as a pretty ribbon tied on a tree to decorate it, or small objects left at the site of resource procurement, such as tobacco or coins. Prayers are given at the time a resource is removed from the environment as well as when it is used. Tribal members often phrase this as "taking care of" or "being respectful of" the environment. Prayers include a statement of need (for what purpose a resource will be used) and wishes of good health and well-being both for the resource and for the people who depend on it. In cases where a plant or animal such as the sage-grouse must be killed to be used as a resource, prayers also help its spirit through a regenerative process. One Tribal elder stated this process succinctly:

When [a sage-grouse] is killed during hunting, tobacco or some other offering is left, and prayers are said to help [its] spirit get safely to the spirit world and so that the Creator would establish another one of those beings here and keep them plentiful. The prayer is both to the [sage-grouse's] spirit and to the Creator. It is done because you have taken something you need to survive, and it helps re-establish the harmony.

Such reciprocal actions are believed to nourish the sage-grouse and assure that it will continue to be available and be nourishing to the people in the future.

“Song of the Sage Hen”¹

Sage Hen landing on a mountain pass
Migrating around
Migrating around
Sage Hen landing on a mountain pass
Migrating around
Migrating around
Walks around there
On warm white sand
Walks around there
On warm white sand

To the Tribes sage-grouse, also known as Hoojah or Hoocha, are medicine birds. The males impart to certain tribal members a spirit of divination, making the possessor a medicine man with powers of healing, divination and exorcism. While this has been described in various publications that speak of the spiritual powers of sage-grouse in the past, this power can still be obtained from the sage-grouse, according to Shoshone-Paiute spiritual leaders. Sage-grouse and their leks are still honored by the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes in various ceremonies and sacred dances.

1.1.2.3 Subsistence reliance and practices concerning sage-grouse

As a subsistence resource, sage-grouse have multiple traditional uses. Depending upon the season, sage-grouse have been traditionally used as food, in clothing, as manufacturing materials, as food for other animals, as archetypes in stories and legends, in making toys and musical instruments, in ceremonial costumes, to assist prayers on their journeys, and as omens. Sage-grouse can be an important source of meat, a staple in the Shoshone-Paiute diet that is available nearly year-round. In early summer and between major salmon and steelhead adult returns, the Tribes dispersed into family units to hunt sage-grouse, while simultaneously gathering seeds, berries, and roots. Sage-grouse eggs are also important in diets, as are the eggs of various other bird species. Sage-grouse feathers are used in fans, on ceremonial costumes, and are preferred as fletching for arrows. Their bones are used for ceremonial whistles which helped prayers ascend to the spirits. Dances, regalia, and observances

¹ Newe Hupia: Shoshoni Poetry Songs. Beverly Crum, Earl Crum, and Jon P. Dayley. Logan: Utah State University Press.

celebrate the bird's place in Shoshone-Paiute culture and society. The sage-grouse is, in some respects, honored as much as the eagle.

Tribal members assert that sage-grouse leks must be protected because they are sacred. Many leks have been used for generations, while the use of some leks extended indefinitely into the past. Further, leks are often present around buttes and rimrocks, which is significant because the Tribes recognize that buttes and rimrocks have their own sanctity, and the presence of sage-grouse adds another level of sacredness to these significant areas.

Various proposals have been advanced for perimeters of protection around leks that extend outward for up to 5 miles, which tribal members believe are necessary for their protection. This is needed in part because the Tribes have noted that leks used for an extended period of time tend to be those that avoid excessive human or cattle-related disturbances. Consequently, actions must be taken to protect culturally-important habitat (including lek and nesting habitat) that the Tribes and sage-grouse depend on for their ongoing existence.

1.1.3 Cultural significance of the greater sage-grouse to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes

Since time immemorial, the Shoshone and Bannock people have relied on the sagebrush steppe ecosystem to provide flora and fauna for subsistence needs. Prior to westward expansion, the sagebrush steppe ecosystem was vast, contiguous and unimpaired by man-made threats. The Shoshone and Bannock people consider the greater sage-grouse, a sagebrush steppe obligate, a staple for subsistence and ceremonial purposes. Today, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes continue to utilize sage-grouse and are concerned about their ability to exist under current management conditions and the impacts that their demise would have on Tribal culture and traditions

The sage-grouse is significant in the Shoshone and Bannock cultures. The tangible significance of sage-grouse is illustrated in tribal traditional dance, sustenance and ceremonial songs. The intangible significance is evident in the spiritual belief associated with sage-grouse. The Chicken Dance is a traditional dance that honors the sage-grouse. This traditional dance imitates the dance the grouse performs during the mating season. The dancers' regalia reflect the image of the grouse in the headdress, bustle and whistle. The grouse is also a traditional sustenance resource and is a part of the traditional diet of the Shoshone Bannock Tribes. On a broad cultural scale the sage-grouse spiritual significance is observed in the acknowledgement that sage-grouse is a part of the web of life and plays an important

role in maintaining balance of life. Specifically the sage-grouse spiritual importance is recognized in the songs sung in traditional ceremonies which speak of the power the sage-grouse possesses.

1.1.3.1 Off-Reservation Reserved Treaty Rights of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes

On July 3, 1868, the Fort Bridger Treaty was entered into between the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the United States. Article IV of the Fort Bridger Treaty reserved off-reservation rights of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, specifically the right to hunt on unoccupied lands of the United States. The Fort Bridger Treaty provided for a unique relationship between the Tribes and the United States and created a formal trust responsibility to the Tribes. Under this obligation the United States has a special fiduciary responsibility to consider the best interests of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes pursuant to the Fort Bridger Treaty. Today, most fundamentally, the modern form of the trust obligation is the federal government's duty to protect Indian lands and treaty resources, including the off-reservation rights the Tribes reserved. This duty to protect treaty resources includes preserving the integrity of lands upon which the resources are located

1.1.4 Idaho historical context

In the State of Idaho, the sage-grouse has been a species of interest for well over a century, providing food, recreational, and research opportunities for Idaho's citizens. Moreover, for centuries, the sage-grouse has also been important to the region's American Indian Tribes for ceremonial and subsistence reasons. It remains an important part of the sagebrush community and is sometimes used as a measure of sagebrush ecosystem health. The Idaho Bird Conservation Plan (Idaho Partners in Flight 2000) utilizes the sage-grouse as an umbrella species, in helping describe general objectives for sagebrush habitats. The sage-grouse was selected for this role since it is a sagebrush obligate, has a relatively large home range incorporating expanses of sagebrush habitat, and its habitat requirements are assumed to encompass those of many other sagebrush obligate avian species. Additional discussion regarding the utility of sage-grouse as an umbrella species can be found in Rowland et al. (2005).

Historical populations of sage-grouse in Idaho are not well documented. Before 1900 sage-grouse were not protected in Idaho. The first Idaho sage-grouse hunting season

was established in 1900 (Autenrieth 1981).² Over the years Idaho's hunting seasons have varied greatly from three month seasons with a 15-20 bird bag in the early 1900s, to closed seasons for 21 of the 31 years from 1918 to 1948. As early as the 1920s, wildlife managers voiced concerns about the future of Idaho's sage-grouse populations. In a trend mirroring that seen in other western states, Idaho has experienced substantial alteration and losses of sagebrush steppe habitat since European settlement.

Drought conditions during the late 1980s through the early 1990s, which resulted in amplified pressures on shrub steppe ecosystems, in concert with continued declines in Idaho's sage-grouse populations, served to heighten concerns among local resource managers. Concerns regarding sage-grouse habitat and/or population trends also resulted in the species designation as Sensitive by Idaho Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Region 4. Broad-scale monitoring of sage-grouse populations did not begin until the 1960s. Statewide, sage-grouse populations in Idaho showed an overall declining trend between 1965-2003 (Figure 1-1).

² The impetus for establishing this initial hunting season was to prohibit spring shooting during critical reproductive periods.

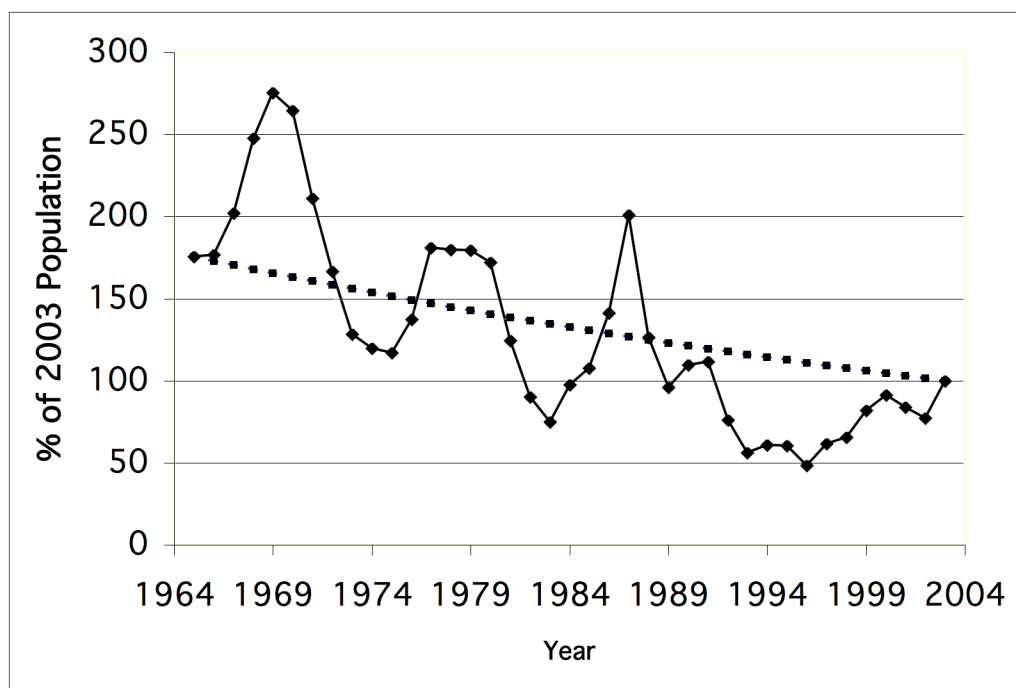


Figure 1-1 Change in the population index for greater sage-grouse in Idaho, 1965-2003 (Connelly et al. 2004)³

1.1.5 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2005 Finding

On January 12, 2005, the USFWS announced the results of their 12-month Finding for three petitions to list the greater sage-grouse as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (USDI-FWS 2005). After reviewing the best available scientific and commercial information, they found that listing, at this time, is not warranted (Appendix C).

In the Finding the USFWS stated, “*Although sagebrush habitat continues to be lost and degraded in parts of the greater sage-grouse’s range (albeit at a lower rate than historically observed), from what we know of the current range and distribution of the sage-grouse, its numbers are well represented. As a result, we find that the species is*

³ The population index (irregular line) was derived from changes in counts of males on the same leks between consecutive years. The regression (dashed) line illustrates the overall downward trend from 1965-2003. For a detailed discussion of the process used in this analysis, see Connelly et al. (2004) pages 6-18 through 6-21. Pages 6-30 through 6-33 of Connelly et al (2004) discuss Idaho sage-grouse population trends in additional detail.

not in danger of extinction, nor is it likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. We are encouraged that sage-grouse and sagebrush conservation efforts will moderate the rate and extent of habitat loss for the species in the future. We strongly encourage the continuation of these efforts” (USDI-FWS 2005).

The Endangered Species Act requires the USFWS to make a decision based on what is known at the time of listing. In the Finding the USFWS noted, *“the future health of both the sagebrush system and sage-grouse depends on how threats are expressed and how managers respond to them in the next 5 to 20 years” (USDI-FWS 2005).*

1.2 Goals and purposes of Plan

1.2.1 Goals

The primary goal of this Plan is to:

1. Maintain, improve, and where possible, increase sage-grouse populations and habitats in Idaho, while considering the predictability and long-term sustainability of a variety of other land uses.

Secondary goals of this Plan include:

2. Establishing broadly representative LWGs in all SGPAs that currently lack them;
3. Fostering and supporting effective LWGs and their activities, throughout the range of sage-grouse in Idaho;
4. Fostering and supporting completion of LWG plans for all of Idaho’s SGPAs; and,
5. Fostering and supporting effective coordination among state and federal agencies, Tribes, and non-governmental cooperators to achieve the primary goal of this Plan.

This Plan is intended to be a **“living document”** that will be periodically updated and/or amended as appropriate (e.g., as new information becomes available, regional and local conditions change, new technologies or techniques become available, additional LWGs complete their local plans and contribute to increased refinement of local site-specific data and information).

1.2.2 Purposes

The overarching purpose of this Plan is to:

1. Effectively conserve Idaho sage-grouse populations and sagebrush communities through support of individual and collective efforts of LWGs, non-governmental organizations, local governments, state and federal agencies, Tribes, and members of the public. The Plan provides those individuals and entities with guidance, information, conservation tools, and related resources necessary to achieve locally and regionally appropriate conservation objectives.

Additional purposes of this Plan include:

2. Development of a framework that will encourage and promote greater consistency among Idaho's LWG plans (e.g., more standardized organizational structure and terminology) as they work to eliminate, reduce or mitigate threats to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat.
3. Integration, to the extent possible, of national, regional, and local knowledge and management objectives, in order to effectively conserve sage-grouse populations and sagebrush communities.
4. Provide for effective coordinated management across jurisdictional boundaries by fostering mechanisms and agreements to coordinate the efforts of: state agencies, federal agencies, and Tribes, with non-governmental individuals and organizations -- to cooperatively implement conservation measures for the sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitats within Idaho.
5. Acknowledge and respect the different perspectives, interests, and legal mandates of wildlife professionals, land managers, Tribes, non-governmental organizations, private landowners, and all others who share a stake and interest in sage-grouse and sagebrush steppe communities.

1.3 Conservation objectives

Given the distribution of sage-grouse across the Idaho landscape, migratory nature of certain sage-grouse populations, variety of seasonal habitats required, complexity of land ownership patterns, and magnitude of certain threats (e.g., wildfire, invasive annual grasses), the long-term viability of sage-grouse in Idaho is dependent on developing and implementing conservation measures across a range of scales.

Focusing efforts primarily at the fine-scale (project, site-specific) may overlook cumulative impacts and important landscape issues such as connectivity between sage-grouse population strongholds, or may divert limited funding from higher priorities in Idaho. Conversely, conservation efforts focused primarily at the mid- or broad-scale may neglect crucial site-specific circumstances or needs. In seeking to understand and address the complex interactions of factors influencing habitat quality and sage-grouse populations, managers should, whenever possible, look across multiple scales. Local working groups should develop and/or adopt local goals and objectives.

For the purposes of this Plan the broad-scale is defined as the State of Idaho (i.e., approximately 1:500,000-plus scale), mid-scale is defined as the Sage Grouse Planning Area (i.e., approximately 1:100,000 scale), and fine-scale is defined as the watershed and/or specific project scale (i.e., approximately 1:24,000 scale).

1.3.1 Population objectives

The following population objectives apply to the broad-, mid-, and fine-scales:

1. Maintain, and increase where possible, the present distribution and abundance of sage-grouse in Idaho.
2. Reduce, eliminate, or mitigate the adverse impacts of human-related or unnatural disturbance to sage-grouse within or near breeding and winter habitat throughout Idaho.

1.3.2 Habitat objectives

The following habitat objectives apply to the broad-, mid-, and fine-scales:

1. Maintain, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat, and continuity of habitats, at multiple spatial scales.
2. Manage Idaho's landscape to foster a dynamic sagebrush ecosystem that includes a diverse species composition of sagebrush, grasses, and forbs; and incorporates structural characteristics that promote rangeland health in general, and sage-grouse habitat requirements in particular.

In addition to the broad conservation objectives identified above, following are specific broad-, mid- and fine-scale sub-objectives.

1.3.2.1 Broad-scale habitat sub-objectives

- Foster the maintenance or recovery of rangewide sage-grouse populations in a manner that complements similar efforts in adjacent states.
- Collaborate with states that share contiguous sage-grouse habitats to maintain, enhance or restore sage-grouse habitat.

1.3.2.2 Mid-scale habitat sub-objectives

- Manage sagebrush so that it is well distributed on the landscape, as ecological site conditions allow. Emphasis should be placed on maintaining or restoring large contiguous core areas or blocks of sagebrush that have the necessary species and age diversity of sagebrush and herbaceous components to produce sustainable sage-grouse habitat. The primary long-term objective is to ensure adequate areas within each SGPA suitable for meeting all seasonal habitat needs of sage-grouse and the sage-grouse population and distribution goals of this Plan. Using the 2004 sage-grouse Habitat Planning Map as a preliminary guide (See SGPA maps located in Chapter 3), maintain, enhance or restore existing key and stronghold sage-grouse habitat across SGPAs.
- Maintain smaller islands, corridors, or mosaic patterns when provision for large, extensive blocks of sagebrush is not feasible or appropriate due to ecological site limitations (e.g., mountainous areas with complex topographic features, sagebrush patches intermingled with forested cover types).
- Enlarge existing stronghold habitats.
- Establish or improve connectivity and genetic interchange between populations by re-establishing suitable habitat in intervening areas.
- Enhance habitat quality and quantity in isolated population areas to enhance population sustainability.
- Increase the proportion of key and stronghold habitat in SGPAs by (1) diversifying structural and species composition and re-establishing sagebrush within large perennial grass seedings, (2) rehabilitating annual exotic

grasslands, (3) managing conifer encroachment to restore sage-grouse habitat (4) improving understory habitat quality in areas where sagebrush cover limits the herbaceous cover needs of sage-grouse, (5) improving understory quality where sagebrush cover is otherwise suitable.⁴

1.3.2.3 Fine-scale sub-objectives

In addition to the appropriate broad- and mid-scale objectives identified above, fine-scale conservation objectives will be identified within each of the LWG plans once completed. The following objectives are also intended to serve as interim objectives in areas where LWG plans are not yet complete or where no LWG currently exists.

- Promote rangeland health and vegetation characteristics (e.g., species diversity including big sagebrush and other sagebrush species, perennial herbaceous cover, forbs, etc.) at the fine-scale that contribute to mid-scale objectives.
- Coordinate with appropriate agencies to map and monitor sage-grouse seasonal habitats (preferably at the population scale if known) to facilitate conservation planning, aid in the prioritization of habitat-improvement and restoration projects, and document the effectiveness of projects or management changes.
- Agencies will collaborate to understand the cumulative effects of management decisions.
- Projects and management actions should contribute to the maintenance, restoration, or rehabilitation of sage-grouse habitats.

1.4 Development of the Idaho Plan and Local Working Group plans

For all of the parties involved in sage-grouse conservation and planning efforts across the state of Idaho, there has been, and continues to be an ongoing learning process relative to: sage-grouse habitat and sage-grouse requirements, changing conditions and priorities across the landscape, effectiveness of various approaches to planning and development of LWG plans, and evolving tools and resources. This document reflects, and is also an artifact, of that fluid and dynamic process.

⁴ Note: items 4 and 5 assume sagebrush is not otherwise limiting on the landscape.

1.4.1 1997 Idaho Plan

In 1997, the Idaho Sage-grouse Task Force, under direction of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission, completed the Idaho Sage-grouse Management Plan (IDFG 1997). The 1997 Plan subdivided Idaho into 13 sage-grouse management areas. These management areas reflected sage-grouse populations or groups of populations by discrete geographic areas in Idaho based on readily definable boundaries, administrative jurisdictions, and current information.

Subsequently, six sage-grouse LWGs were formed to assist in local sage-grouse planning and management efforts in selected areas of Idaho. A seventh group, previously established in Shoshone Basin in 1994, was also adopted as a LWG. The original LWG boundaries in most cases overlapped one or more of the original sage-grouse management areas.

1.4.2 Current and ongoing planning efforts

Planning for sage-grouse conservation has continued to evolve in Idaho since 1997. The preliminary planning efforts focused mostly on what were identified as priority areas. To ensure that all areas of Idaho that harbor sage-grouse habitat are eventually addressed, and to further statewide and local conservation efforts, the original 13 management areas were reconfigured into 13 SGPAs.

These 13 revised SGPAs (Figure 1-2) form the geographic foundation for mid-scale sage-grouse conservation planning and for the efficient marshalling of conservation resources. Although these new planning areas deviate somewhat from the original sage-grouse management areas described in the 1997 plan, they correlate directly with existing LWG area boundaries.

Idaho Sage-grouse Planning Area Boundaries

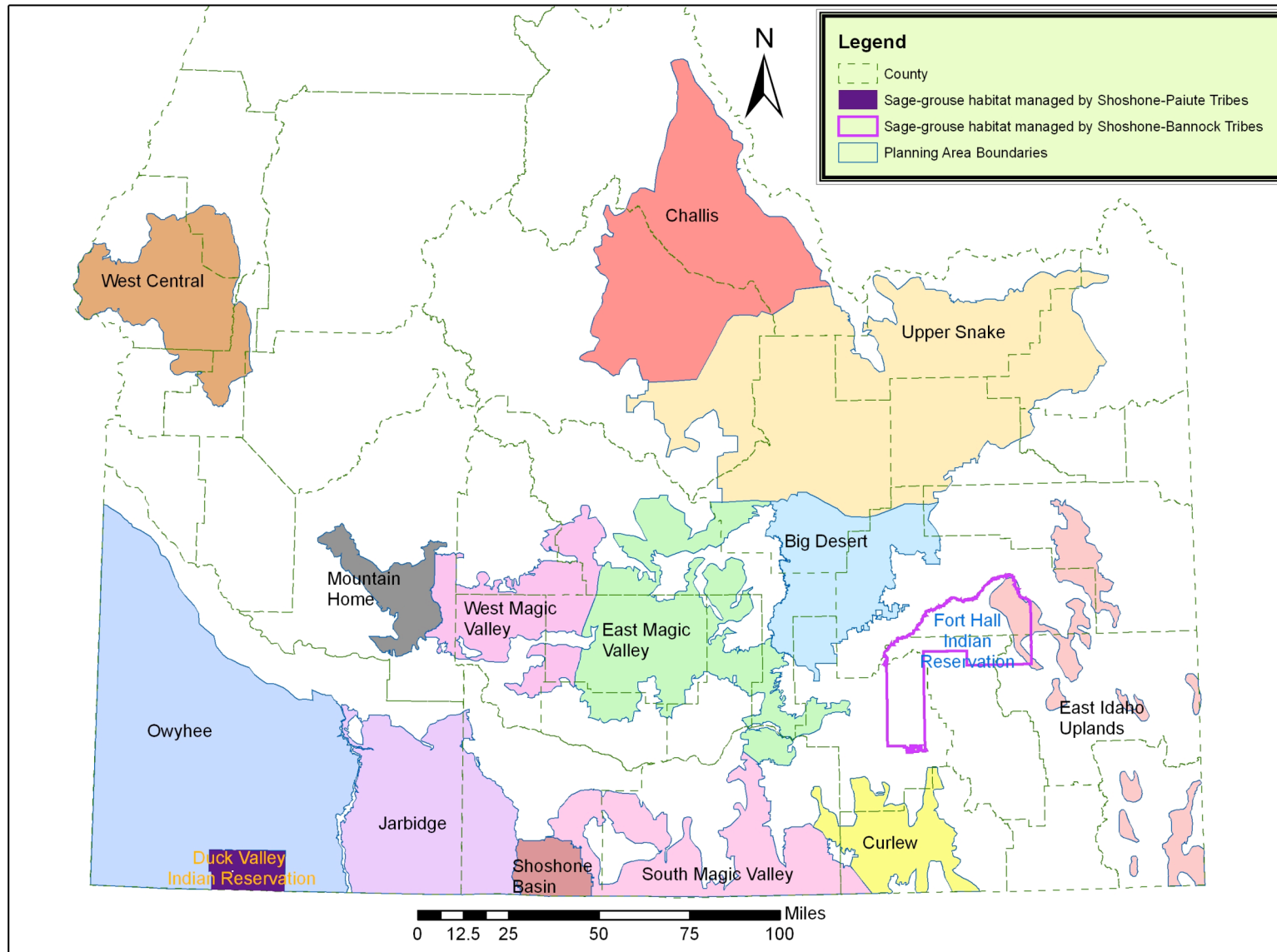


Figure 1-2 Idaho Sage-grouse Planning Areas.

In 2003, the Director of the Idaho Department Fish and Game appointed the Idaho Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC). In addition to representatives from key agencies, this committee includes private citizens from agricultural and conservation groups and at least one member from each Local Working Group. In addition to improving communication between LWGs and advising the state on how to distribute federal grant funds, the SAC has assisted in updating the 1997 plan.

As of December 31, 2005 two LWG plans have been completed, and three are nearing completion (Table 1-1). The development of new LWGs in areas without them, and completion of LWG plans for those areas is a priority of this Plan.

Table 1-1 Status of LWGs and LWG Plans by SGPA

SGPA	LWG Status⁵	LWG Plan Status⁶
Big Desert	None at this time	None at this time ⁷
Challis	Started 2002	In development
Curlew	Started 1998	Completed
East Idaho Uplands	None at this time	None at this time ⁶
East Magic Valley	None at this time	None at this time ⁶
Jarbridge	Started 1999	Draft complete
Mountain Home	None at this time	None at this time
Owyhee	Started 1998	Completed
Shoshone Basin	Started 1994	Draft complete
South Magic Valley	None at this time	None at this time ⁶
Upper Snake River	Started 1998	Completed
West Central	Started 2004	In development
West Magic Valley	None at this time	None at this time ⁶

1.4.3 Relationship between Local Working Group plans and state Plan

The state Plan identifies threats at the broad-scale, while also providing a toolbox of mid- and fine-scale conservation measures for use and/or adaptation by LWGs (as appropriate to local population and habitat conditions), and for use in cases where a LWG plan has not been completed, or where no LWG currently exists. The LWG

⁵ As of December 31, 2005.

⁶ As of December 31, 2005.

⁷ In 2004, IDFG Regions, in cooperation with local partners, began identifying conservation issues for the Big Desert, East Idaho Uplands, East Magic Valley and West Magic Valley SGPAs, to aid in the preparation for the eventual establishment of LWGs in these areas. The South Magic Valley SGPA began preliminary discussions during 2005.

plans will identify threats and appropriate conservation measures at the mid-and fine-scale.

This state Plan is designed to provide guidelines and specific recommendations intended to promote a level of consistency (e.g., identification of range of threats, standard terminology, format, etc.) among LWG plans.

The state Plan and the LWG plans are expected to be “living documents,” as new information becomes available, and/or techniques and technologies improve, the plans should be updated or revised.

1.4.3.1 Local Working Group Plans

The purpose of LWG plans is to increase sage-grouse populations and/or improve sage-grouse habitat within the Plan’s boundary, while considering the predictability and long term sustainability of a variety of other land uses. The LWG plans should identify potential threats and provide recommended actions to mitigate those threats, benchmarks for completing those recommended actions, and monitoring protocols to address those threats that are affecting sage-grouse or their habitat within the LWG boundary.

The LWG plans provide the guidance that agencies, businesses, and individuals should consider when performing actions in sage-grouse habitats. In general, the expectation is that when sage-grouse concerns arise at the local level, LWGs, agency representatives, landowners, and others will look first to the appropriate LWG plan for specific guidance. If a LWG plan is silent on the issue of concern, parties would look next to the state Plan for guidance. The LWGs are expected to work with, and through, the appropriate federal and state agencies, landowners, and regulatory processes to implement the conservation measures/actions identified in their LWG plans to reduce, eliminate, or mitigate identified threats to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat

1.4.3.2 The Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho

The goal of the Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho is to maintain, improve, and where possible, increase sage-grouse populations and habitats in Idaho, while considering the predictability and long-term sustainability of a variety of other land uses.

Some geographic areas in Idaho do not have active LWGs. The Conservation Plan identifies statewide threats and a toolbox of conservation measures to address those threats.

The Conservation Plan will also serve as a useful reference tool to support all LWGs as well as areas without LWGs by:

- providing background information and resources regarding sage-grouse and sagebrush ecology;
- providing an overview of sage-grouse populations and sage-grouse habitats within the state;
- discussing threats at a state wide level;
- providing a toolbox of conservation measures which may be used by LWGs;
- discussing the data and research needs that would lead to a better understanding of sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat; and
- providing protocols for monitoring and evaluation of sage-grouse populations and sage-grouse habitats.

By providing these various resources for consideration by LWGs, the Plan encourages a level of consistency among the LWG plans and actions.

All completed LWG plans will be incorporated as appendices to this Plan.

The most recent update of this Plan and each of the most recent version of the completed LWG plans will also be located together at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/hunt/grouse/> along with links to a selection of relevant informational resources.

1.4.4 Relationship to other planning efforts and regulations

Federal agencies administer roughly 73% of existing sagebrush lands in Idaho. State and private lands comprise an additional 7% and 19%, respectively. Complicating matters, the interspersed and continuity of land ownership patterns varies widely across Idaho; from large, contiguous acreages of federal and state lands in the

southwestern part of the state to more fragmented or mosaic patterns of federal, state, and private lands in the south-central and eastern portions.

In addition to collaborative efforts within Idaho, coordination between Idaho and adjoining states will be necessary. The primary mechanisms for interstate coordination include the 1999 Memorandum of Understanding between member states comprising the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), and the 2000 Memorandum of Understanding between WAFWA and the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, and USFWS. The 1999 MOU is currently under revision. A range-wide sage-grouse conservation strategy, also currently under development, will help guide these collaborative interstate efforts and will provide recommendations for more specific eco-regional conservation measures.

Parties to this Plan recognize that in some instances, federal and state agencies may need to formalize conservation measures or other actions through additional processes separate from this Plan, such as resource management plan amendments, terms and conditions, or other means including compliance with National Environmental Policy Act requirements or state law.

1.4.5 Authorities and missions

In implementing this Plan, a variety of multi-disciplinary expertise will be required. Resource users may have an intimate knowledge of local conditions, can sometimes provide innovative solutions to problems, and can contribute an important historical perspective. Agency personnel have expertise in monitoring and managing wildlife populations and habitats and generally have at their disposal state of the art technical equipment and procedures.

Cooperating agencies and organizations that will participate in the implementation of this Plan are themselves governed by specific legal mandates, responsibilities, and/or mission statements related to their respective involvement in conservation issues or conservation planning.

Following is a summary of the authorities and the mission statements of the various entities that have participated in development of this Plan and who will participate in the implementation of this Plan, and many LWG plans.

1.4.5.1 Local Working Groups

The LWGs are the heart of Idaho's sage-grouse conservation strategy, and are critical to the successful implementation of this plan. To be successful, the LWGs will need to represent a broad range of interests affected by, and concerned with, sage-grouse management and populations. Membership should include, but is not limited to, local land-owners; members of the public; non-governmental organizations; representatives of industry; local government; state and federal agencies; and American Indian Tribes. LWGs that represent a broad range of interests and perspectives ensure a diverse base of support for LWG proposed projects or actions. For example, if projects proposed by a LWG have broad public support they are less likely to be challenged. LWGs may also provide valuable input to inform and potentially improve agency decision-making.

The collaborative development of broadly-represented LWG plans is vital to successful execution of those plans through identification of local threats and appropriate conservation actions, project identification and implementation, contribution to monitoring and evaluation activities, and periodic updating of the LWG plans. As participants on the LWGs, state, federal and Tribal representatives are expected to keep LWG members apprised of any conflicting legal mandates or concerns as the local plans are in development.

1.4.5.2 Federal agencies

1.4.5.2.1 U.S. Bureau of Land Management

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act, or FLPMA, which provides overall direction to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the conservation and management of public lands, also allows the agency to participate in cooperative agreements (43 USC 1737 Sec. 307b). BLM Manual section 6840 (Special Status Species Management) requires that actions authorized on BLM-administered lands do not contribute to the need to list federal candidate or Bureau sensitive species under provisions of the Endangered Species Act.

The land use planning process, mandated by FLPMA and described in the regulations at 43 CFR 1610, is used to identify desired outcomes (goals and objectives) and allowable uses and actions anticipated to achieve desired outcomes on BLM-administered lands. BLM's planning process will develop management direction consistent with the Idaho Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse and integrated across all resource uses.

BLM Fundamentals of Rangeland Health and Standards and Guidelines for Grazing Administration (43 CFR Subpart 4180), in part, require the management of rangelands to ensure that “*Habitats are, or are making significant progress toward being, restored or maintained for Federal threatened and endangered species, Federal Proposed...and other special status species*” (43 CFR 4180.1).

In Idaho, 43 CFR 4180 is implemented through the Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management, adopted August 1997 (USDI-BLM 1997). Where appropriate on the landscape, Idaho BLM rangelands are expected to meet eight Standards for Rangeland Health or should be making significant progress toward meeting the standards. Standard 8, which requires that “*Habitats are suitable to maintain viable populations of threatened and endangered, sensitive and other special status species*”, is of particular relevance to sage-grouse.

BLM has developed a National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (USDI Bureau of Land Management, 2004). The purpose of the comprehensive National Sage-grouse Strategy is to set goals and objectives, assemble guidance and resource materials, and provide a comprehensive management direction for the BLM’s contributions to on-going multi-state sage-grouse conservation effort in cooperation with WAFWA. Implementation of BLM’s National Sage-grouse Strategy and the state level Sage-grouse Conservation Strategies will complement and expand the ongoing efforts to conserve sagebrush ecosystems on public lands administered by the BLM for the benefit of sage-grouse and other wildlife species.

1.4.5.2.2 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

The mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is to “*provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.*” Toward this end, NRCS is committed to improving biological resources by maintaining a high level of expertise in planning, using, and conserving soil, water, animals, plants, air, and related human resources. NRCS provides ecosystem-based assistance for the integrated management needed to sustain natural resources. Ecosystem-based assistance requires NRCS to use biological sciences to: 1) develop and improve soil, water, animals, plants, air, and related human resources as integral components of all ecosystems, such as forest, range, cropland, and aquatic ecosystems; 2) protect the habitat of threatened and endangered species of plants and animals; and 3) restore and safeguard unique ecosystems.

1.4.5.2.3 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Technical Advisors on Plan)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a bureau within the U.S. Department of the Interior. Its mission is, “*working with others, to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*” While not a formal party to this Plan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has had ongoing representation on the SAC, and has provided helpful perspectives during the preparation of portions of this Plan.

1.4.5.2.4 U.S. Forest Service

The 2005 planning rule, in part, establishes requirements for the sustainability of ecological systems, the goal of which is “to provide a framework to contribute to sustaining native ecological systems by providing ecological conditions to support diversity of native plant and animal species in the plan area” (36 CFR 219.10). Agriculture Department Regulation 9500-4 directs the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to manage “habitats for all existing native and desired non-native plants, fish, and wildlife species in order to maintain at least viable populations of such species,” and to “avoid actions which may cause a species to become threatened or endangered”. USFS Manual section 2672.1 (Sensitive Species Management) directs national forests to provide special management emphasis for sensitive species of plants and animals to ensure their viability and to preclude trends toward endangerment that would result in the need for federal listing. Manual section 2672.12 allows regional foresters to enter into conservation agreements with the USFWS to remove threats to candidate species.

1.4.5.2.5 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is an agency under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Wildlife Services program is one of several programs in APHIS. Under the authority of the Animal Damage Control Act of 1931, Wildlife Services provides Federal leadership and expertise in addressing a wide range of conflicts between humans and wildlife. Part of this role involves providing assistance to other agencies and the public in addressing wildlife damage to natural resources. This Plan and some of the LWG plans have identified predation as one of the multiple potential threats to sage grouse, and Wildlife Services can provide expertise and assistance in dealing with predation concerns at the local level.

1.4.5.3 American Indian Tribes

The United States has a unique legal relationship with American Indian Tribes as set forth in the Constitution of the United States, treaties, statutes, Executive Orders, and court decisions. The Federal Government has enacted numerous regulations and policies that further establish and define a trust relationship with Indian tribes.

All federally-recognized American Indian Tribes have off-reservation interests in public lands and many retain pre-existing rights reserved through treaty or executive order language. The legal basis of these tribal rights and interests are founded in the inherent sovereignty of American Indian Tribes; continuing aboriginal rights; pre-existing rights reserved in treaties, executive orders; agreements; and federal statutes.

The relationship between Federal agencies and American Indian Tribes is defined by numerous laws and regulations addressing the requirement of Federal agencies to notify or consult with American Indian Tribes, or otherwise consider their rights and interests, when planning and implementing Federal undertakings. As such, federal land managing agencies participating in the Idaho's sage-grouse conservation Plan will work closely with American Indian Tribes through the government-to-government consultation process to appropriately address tribal rights and interests.

Sage-grouse have significant cultural importance to American Indian Tribes and must be considered in relation to the associated rights and interests American Indian Tribes have on federally-administered lands. In conservation planning and project development and implementation efforts for sage-grouse or their habitat occurring on federal lands, federal land managing agencies will ensure tribal involvement through the government-to-government consultation process.

1.4.5.4 State agencies

1.4.5.4.1 Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Idaho Code, Section 36-103 states, *“All wildlife, including all wild animals, wild birds, and fish within the State of Idaho is hereby declared to be the property of the State of Idaho. It shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed. It shall only be captured or taken at such times or places, under such conditions, or by such means, or in such manner, as will preserve, protect, and perpetuate such wildlife, and provide for the citizens of this state and, as by law permitted to others, continued supplies of such wildlife for hunting, fishing, and trapping”*.

1.4.5.4.2 Idaho Department of Lands

The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) is directed by Article IX-Section 8 of the Idaho Constitution to manage the approximately 2.4 million acres of state endowment lands *“in such a manner as to secure the maximum long-term financial return to the institution to which granted.”* IDL has adopted a management policy that recognizes the value of wildlife and their habitats and considers the impacts to wildlife habitat in management plans or projects. Where appropriate, IDL takes measures that protect or improve important and critical wildlife habitat, subject to the fundamental mission of IDL to support the endowments.

1.4.5.4.3 Idaho Governor’s Office of Species Conservation

Title 67, Section 818 of the Idaho Code allows Office of Species Conservation (OSC) to negotiate agreements with federal agencies concerning endangered, threatened, and candidate species. OSC is also responsible for coordinating the efforts of all state departments and divisions with duties and responsibilities affecting endangered species, threatened species, and species to be listed. In 2004, OSC’s role was clarified to include petitioned and rare and declining species as well.

1.4.5.4.4 Idaho State Department of Agriculture

The mission of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture is *“serving consumers and agriculture by safeguarding the public, plants, animals, and the environment through education and regulation.”*

1.4.5.5 County government

County governments provide diverse services related to public safety, essential programs, natural resources, and manage public assets for the common well-being of each County’s citizens. Counties have responsibilities related to planning and zoning, weed control, and permitting, among others. Some Idaho counties have also adopted local natural resource plans for purposes of creating a coordinating role with federal agencies, under FLPMA and the Forest Management acts. County government can play a valuable and important role in sage-grouse habitat conservation planning and implementation. Some counties have expressed an interest in entering into an MOU for sage-grouse habitat conservation. For those counties, a sample template for a County/IDFG MOU is located in Appendix K.

1.4.5.6 Non-governmental organizations and industry groups

1.4.5.6.1 Ada County Fish and Game League

The mission of the Ada County Fish and Game League is to assist in the conservation of wildlife resources in cooperation with similar associations and wildlife advocates for the benefit of all citizens, and to promote a high standard of sportsmanship and respect for Idaho's wildlife and associated natural resources on public lands.

1.4.5.6.2 Idaho Bird Hunters

The mission of Idaho Bird Hunters is to 1) enhance and perpetuate wild game birds in Idaho; 2) to establish and encourage conservation of game bird habitat; 3) to conduct research, training, and enhancement of knowledge concerning upland game birds; 4) to promote the shooting sport of game bird hunting through sportsmanship, educational programs on guns, and shot-gunning; and 5) field testing of gun dogs.

1.4.5.6.3 Idaho Conservation League

The Idaho Conservation League preserves Idaho's clean water, wilderness and quality of life through citizen action, public education, and professional advocacy.

1.4.5.6.4 Idaho Cattle Association

The mission of the Idaho Cattle Association is to coordinate and advance the economic well being of the Idaho Beef Industry through innovative and effective political, educational, and marketing programs accepted and supported by industry segments, partners, and coalitions.

1.4.5.6.5 Idaho Wildlife Federation

The mission of the Idaho Wildlife Federation is to promote the conservation and protection of our natural resources, wildlife, and wildlife habitat for current and future generations.

1.4.5.7 Landowners

Private landowners have specific rights in relationship to the lands they own. Their voluntary participation in actions that affect sage-grouse habitat is vital to the successful implementation of this Plan.

1.4.5.8 Members of the public

The participation of members of the public is important to the successful conservation of sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat in Idaho.

1.5 Guidance, tools and resources

As noted previously, a primary purpose of this Plan is to support LWGs, non-governmental organizations, local governments, state and federal agencies, Tribes, private landowners, and members of the public, in their individual and collective efforts to effectively conserve Idaho sage-grouse populations and sagebrush communities. This Plan has been designed to provide those individuals and entities with guidance, information, conservation tools, and related resources necessary to achieve locally and regionally appropriate conservation objectives.

The following section includes some general and specific guidance, as well as a summary of some of the available tools and resources for use by new and existing LWGs, as well as in areas where no LWGs currently exist. Establishment of LWGs in SGPAs that currently lack them, and completion of LWG plans in all of Idaho's SGPAs, is a priority in Idaho. This Plan is intended to provide the basis for local planning so LWGs do not need to dwell on background or administrative detail in their plans. Thus, the LWGs may rely on the background information presented in this Plan and focus their efforts on local evaluations, on-the-ground projects, implementation and monitoring needs.

1.5.1 Summary of key activities

The following section summarizes the key activities that LWGs are expected to accomplish. In areas with an existing LWG some or all of these activities may have been completed or may be ongoing. Interim activities are also identified for areas with no LWG in place.

1.5.1.1 Areas with no Local Working Group

- In SGPAs with no LWG, the respective IDFG Region will lead organization of interagency start-up teams to begin aggressive outreach to establish a LWG. In 2004 and 2005 IDFG initiated start-up teams in several SGPAs that lack LWGs, including the Big Desert, East Idaho Uplands, and East, South, and West Magic Valley. These efforts will continue with initiation of LWGs in these areas anticipated by December 31, 2006. Formal IDFG regional support of a LWG in the Mountain Home SGPA is also anticipated by December 31, 2006. Table 1-2 identifies the primary agency offices in SGPAs that either lack LWGs or are in the process of starting up new LWGs.

Table 1-2 Summary of primary agency offices in sage-grouse planning areas currently without existing local working groups⁸

SGPA	Agency offices
Big Desert	BLM-Upper Snake, IDFG-Southeast, IDL, NRCS, ISDA, DOE
East Idaho Uplands	BLM-Pocatello, IDFG-SE & Upper Snake, IDL, Caribou NF, NRCS, ISDA
East Magic Valley	BLM-Shoshone/Burley, IDFG-Magic Valley, IDL, National Park Service; Minidoka NWR, NRCS, ISDA
West Magic Valley	BLM-Shoshone, IDFG-Magic Valley, IDL, Sawtooth NF, NRCS, ISDA
South Magic Valley	BLM-Burley, Sawtooth NF, IDFG-Magic Valley, IDL, NRCS, ISDA, NPS
Mountain Home	BLM-Four Rivers, IDFG-SW & Magic Valley, Boise NF, NRCS, IDL, ISDA

- Interagency start-up teams, with the help of community members and others, will identify and recruit individuals who share an interest and stake in the conservation of sage-grouse and sagebrush communities to form and participate in a LWG. Interagency start-up teams should work aggressively to ensure a broad and balanced representation of interests on each LWG (e.g., private landowners, ranchers, farmers, citizens, non-governmental organizations, outdoor enthusiasts, conservationists, local government and industry, state and federal agency representatives, Tribal representatives, etc.).
- If start-up of a LWG is delayed the interim inter-agency team should identify threats or other conservation issues in order to initiate conservation actions (through projects, changes in management, etc.) deemed crucial to the conservation of sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat in that SGPA. The interim

⁸ Note: this list does not necessarily represent a comprehensive identification of agencies that would be involved, but is intended to represent primary agencies that may have specific management responsibilities in each SGPA.

inter-agency team should work together to ensure needed data are assembled and made available in support of annual updates to the Sage-grouse Habitat Planning Map (see Chapters 5 and 6), collaborate on annual updates to the SAC consistent with the guidelines for LWGs, and share other data as appropriate.

- Once a LWG is established in the individual SGPAs, it will be important for that LWG to review in the context of local conditions and information, any inter-agency products to identify (or refine) and prioritize, local threats and related conservation issues and measures. Interim identification of threats and conservation measures by inter-agency teams in areas without LWGs is in no way intended to preclude or supercede subsequent identification and prioritization of local threats in that SGPA once a LWG is in place and is operating.
- State and federal agency supervisors or line officers will support this interim process by assigning one or more local field staff (e.g., biologist, rangeland management specialist, fire use specialist, ecologist, or other, as appropriate) to participate on the start-up team (and subsequently on the LWG once it is established). Moreover, local agency managers should recognize there might be circumstances where their personal participation is also required. In addition, agency supervisors should also anticipate that there will be periodic need for timely GIS support at the local level.

1.5.1.2 Development of Local Working Group plan and timelines

- Each LWG should seek to assemble and maintain a diverse membership that includes a broad and balanced representation of interests (e.g., private landowners, ranchers, farmers, citizens, non-governmental organizations, outdoor enthusiasts, conservationists, local government and industry, state and federal agency representatives, Tribal representatives, etc.) The use of a trained facilitator is required from the initiation of LWGs through the development of a completed LWG plan. After the LWG plan is completed, a trained facilitator is strongly recommended, but optional, based on a decision of the LWG members. Funding for a trained facilitator will be provided.
- Develop and recommend quantifiable population objectives. Each LWG, with assistance from agency representatives, should develop and recommend specific population objectives based on lek counts, or best available data. LWG population objectives should contribute to the achievement of broad-scale population objectives presented in this Plan (see Section 1.3.1).

- Develop and recommend quantifiable habitat objectives. Each LWG, with assistance from agency representatives, should develop and recommend specific habitat objectives that maintain, and increase where possible, habitat quantity and quality based on local SGPA conditions and available monitoring data and research.
- Each LWG should identify, and to the extent possible, prioritize threats to sage-grouse populations and habitat at the local level. This state Plan provides a summary and prioritization of threats at a statewide scale. Several threats, including wildfire, infrastructure, annual grasslands, seeded perennial grasslands, and conifer encroachment have been substantially quantified at the SGPA level as well. This information is provided to facilitate the identification and prioritization of local threats at the SGPA or sub-SGPA level. LWGs that have not already completed this activity may wish to use the summary of statewide threats presented in this Plan as a starting point. Those who have already identified local threats may wish to review their identified threats in the context of the statewide threats.
- Existing LWGs with draft plans (i.e., Jarbidge, Shoshone Basin) should complete and finalize their plans no later than December 31, 2006.
- Existing LWGs that do not currently have draft plans (i.e., West Central, Challis) should complete and finalize their plans no later than December 31, 2007.
- New LWGs (i.e., formal LWG has not been initiated as of January 1, 2006) should make every effort to complete their respective plans within two years of inception of the LWG.
- Each LWG should identify appropriate conservation measures/actions to address localized threats to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat. This Plan includes a “toolbox” of recommended conservation measures for use and/or adaptation by LWGs in their own planning efforts.
- Each LWG should identify monitoring and evaluation actions necessary to update population and habitat data, and to gauge the effectiveness of conservation actions. This effort should be closely coordinated with IDFG and other agencies. (See Chapter 5 for additional discussion.)
- New LWGs are expected to utilize the standardized outline for LWG plans presented in Section 1.5.2.2 of this Plan when developing their LWG plans.
- The SAC has not proposed a formal process for determining when a plan is complete. Currently, LWG plans are considered complete when approved by the

LWG (based on decision-making process and LWG membership as defined by each LWG).

1.5.1.3 Implementation of Local Working Group plans

- Each LWG should identify priority conservation actions and related projects based on their habitat and population objectives, local threat characterizations, and other known local factors (e.g., common sense, time-limited opportunities, etc.)
- Federal land management agencies that participate on the LWGs are expected to take the lead in facilitating, preparing, or contracting necessary (NEPA) documentation for specific recommended conservation actions on Federal lands. Although limitations in funding and human resources may in some instances constrain the level of Federal participation, active participation by Federal agencies is vital and should be considered a priority by the relevant agencies.
- Participating state agencies (IDFG, IDL, and ISDA), the NRCS, and in some cases county government, are expected to assume the lead for coordinating with private landowners, pursuing necessary authorizations or agreements and funding, and cooperating with the implementation of projects or conservation measures on private and state lands.
- Each LWG should provide information necessary to update the Sage-grouse Habitat Planning Map annually. The process for updating the map is described in detail in Chapter 5. Detailed reminders, including points of contact will be provided to LWGs each year in the early fall.
- Each LWG should provide a concise, written progress report to the SAC by December 31 of each year summarizing: (1) progress and success of project implementation within the SGPA; (2) status of studies, research, or research proposals within the SGPA; (3) discussion of new issues, project priorities, and problems; and (4) actions or projects planned for the ensuing year.
- Each LWG should update and/or revise their LWG plans at least every five years.

1.5.2 Local Working Group plan outline

A number of the LWGs in Idaho have been working collaboratively on development of their plans for quite some time. The dedicated efforts of the private citizens, non-

governmental organization and agency representatives, and facilitators, who have participated in these processes, have contributed substantially to the development of this state Plan.

Participants in these processes have indicated that providing consistent guidelines regarding the desired structure and overall content of the LWG plans as well as other tools that might facilitate the LWG plan development (e.g., a summary types of threats, biological background information, etc.), could substantially accelerate the development of new LWG plans, and contribute value to plans that are currently in development.

The following outline is based on lessons learned from the development of the initial LWG plans, ongoing planning efforts, ideas gleaned from other states' sage-grouse plans, and from Idaho's own statewide planning efforts. This outline is designed to promote consistency among Idaho's LWG plans and aid in the timely completion of those plans.

1.5.2.1 How the outline is intended to be used

This LWG plan outline is provided with the following specific *recommendations and/or requirements*:

- New LWGs (i.e., formal LWG not initiated as of January 1, 2006) will be *required* to use this outline as the basis for their LWG plans;
- Existing LWGs (i.e., formed prior to January 1, 2006) that are developing, but have not completed, their LWG plans as of December 31, 2006, are *strongly encouraged* to use this outline as the basis for their plans;
- LWGs that have completed or will complete their plans prior to December 31, 2006 are not required to use this outline but *may wish to consider* adopting this format when completing revisions or updates to their plans in the future.

1.5.2.2 Outline components

LWGs may wish to add additional chapters (other than those identified here) to their plans but the following outline identifies minimum content and recommended organization:

A. Introduction

- Conservation goals and objectives for the SGPA
- Summary of LWG participation and planning process

B. Status of sage-grouse habitat and population in the SGPA

- Population overview (see Chapter 3)
- Habitat conditions overview (see Chapter 3)

Note: the repetition of background information related to sagebrush and sage-grouse ecology is readily available in the state Plan and Rangewide Conservation Assessment. Unless there are compelling reasons, or unique local situations, the reiteration of this information is not needed or recommended.

C. Threats to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat in the SGPA

- Identify local threats to sage-grouse and sage-grouse habitat
- Use the discussion and prioritization of statewide threats presented in this state Plan as a starting point to identify and prioritize local threats (see Chapter 4).
- Consider using the ranking process employed by the Idaho Sage-grouse Science Panel (Appendix E).

D. Conservation measures to address local threats

- Identify specific conservation measures (actions) appropriate to address locally identified threats, including potential restoration projects or other treatments (see Section 4.3)

E. Monitoring and evaluation

- Identify monitoring actions necessary to ascertain effectiveness of conservation measures and progress towards meeting conservation goals and objectives (see Chapter 5).
- The Idaho sage-grouse habitat restoration coordinator is available to assist with monitoring-related questions/protocols (see Appendix F for contact information).

F. Implementation strategy

- Present an implementation strategy for the LWG plan that includes identification of: who, what, when, how and where.

G. Adaptive management

- Identify a process and/or timeline for updating and/or revising the various components of the LWG plan.

H. Literature citations

I. Appendices (as necessary)

1.5.3 Additional support and tools for Local Working Groups

The following support and tools will be provided to LWGs. The purpose of these activities and tools is to facilitate effectiveness of LWG processes and products, and to improve communication, coordination and consistency between LWGs.

- *Regular communication with and between LWG members.* Regular meetings of the Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC), and other methods (e.g., regular email updates, etc.) will be used to ensure that LWG members receive regular and timely informational updates and have adequate opportunities to coordinate activities or talk with other LWGs as deemed beneficial to their objectives.
- *Provide for a neutral, trained facilitator.* To ensure LWG meetings are planned and executed around a specific agenda; foster balanced, constructive participation by all group members; assist the group in articulating key points; and ensure notes or minutes are recorded and disseminated in a timely manner, provisions will be made for a neutral, trained facilitator for each start-up LWG through to completion of a LWG plan. Those LWGs with completed plans are strongly encouraged to continue using a trained facilitator and funding will be provided for that purpose. Implementing agencies will identify funding needs and potential funding sources for additional facilitators.
- *Provide support to resolve internal LWG disagreements.* In cases where LWGs are unable to arrive at agreement or consensus with respect to local objectives, conservation measures, interpretation of data, or other issues, the LWG may request review of the issue by the statewide Sage-grouse Advisory Committee (SAC).
- *Make available expertise of the sage-grouse habitat restoration coordinator and other technical experts.* In 2005, IDFG hired an individual to assist LWGs with planning, grant/proposal writing, implementation and monitoring of restoration projects (see Appendix F for contact information.)
- *Facilitate NEPA and out-year project planning.* Participating federal agencies are expected to help LWGs by taking the lead in facilitating, preparing, or contracting necessary National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation, as needed, for specific recommended conservation actions on

public lands. Project proposals or measures should also be incorporated into respective agency activity plans, annual work plans, or out-year funding proposals as appropriate.

1.6 Implementation funding

Adequate funding is essential to the success of this conservation effort. The SAC will quantify financial and staffing needs to implement this plan at both the local and statewide levels and identify strategies to obtain funding by December 31, 2006. The SAC will also coordinate with Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Western Governors Association, federal agencies, and others to obtain funding needed for sage-grouse conservation. Identification of adequate funding is a priority for the SAC. In addition, LWG members should work to identify alternative local and partnership funding.

1.7 Use of WAFWA guidelines in Plan

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) tasked a team of biologists to update sage-grouse habitat management guidelines developed in the mid 1970s (Braun et al. 1977). The resulting Connelly et al. guidelines (referred to in this document as the WAFWA guidelines, or Connelly et al. 2000*b*) were designed to preempt, reverse, or mitigate population declines and maintain viable populations of sage grouse based on best available current data and knowledge (Connelly et al. 2000*b*).

The WAFWA guidelines were based on a compilation of literature, and describe general site conditions necessary to meet the seasonal habitat requirements of sage-grouse (Connelly et al. 2000*b*). In presenting the WAFWA guidelines, the authors acknowledged information gaps and regional variations in habitat structure, composition, and other factors, and therefore recommended that local biologists apply quantitative data from habitat and population monitoring in responding specifically to local conditions.

Moreover, the WAFWA guidelines do not describe desired conditions for habitat on a landscape scale, nor do they identify plant composition and structural characteristics across all sagebrush communities in which sage-grouse occur. Some of the federal agencies are currently working to develop a strategy to evaluate habitat at the landscape scale, meet the habitat needs of sage-grouse and other animals that are associated with the sagebrush steppe ecosystem, and prescribe appropriate management strategies that address multiple scales.

In the context of this Plan the WAFWA guidelines were used as a technical reference to help guide development of a toolbox of conservation measures that LWGs and others may select from and/or adapt as appropriate to local conditions, in order to maintain and/or enhance sage-grouse populations and habitat in Idaho. The authors of this Plan recognize there may be important local variations in habitat structure and composition, as well as other local factors, which will also influence the selection, design, and implementation of appropriate site-specific conservation actions.

1.8 WAFWA Range-wide conservation strategy

The WAFWA Conservation Planning Framework Team has initiated development of the Range-wide Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Conservation Strategy (R-W Strategy). Completion is scheduled for December 2006. State-level (e.g., Idaho Sage-grouse Conservation Plan) and Local Working Group conservation plans will form the foundation of the R-W Strategy. Substrategies developed by various teams will address the following elements: (1) funding, (2) communication and outreach, (3) implementation monitoring, (4) conservation issues, (5) effectiveness monitoring, (6) adaptive management, and (7) research/technology. The national BLM Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy will also be incorporated in conjunction with Range-wide Strategies Team processes.

A national interagency group, the Sage-grouse Habitat Assessment Framework Technical Working Group, has also been formed to assist in developing a standardized approach for describing sage-grouse habitats. This tool will enhance cooperative conservation efforts across state and jurisdictional boundaries, by providing consistent processes, terminology and related information.